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ABSTRACT

The adult Soviet immigrant student's transition experience in the United States is examined from three perspectives: socio-historical, methodological, and linguistic. Emphasis is placed on the necessary adaptation of existing "survival skill" English as a second language (ESL) activities in order to accommodate the cultural perceptions particular to this group. Sixteen model activities, along with suggested follow-up tasks of varying levels, are presented. These cover the areas of employment, money management, consumerism, community orientation, and housing. In each instance, the Soviet lifestyle is contrasted with the American. Also, Soviet pedagogy is contrasted with American methods of teaching and learning. Finally, a contrastive analysis of the English and Russian languages is outlined. (Author/AMH)

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CLASS STRUGGLES: ESL AND ADULT SOVIET IMMIGRANTS

By

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, more than 75,000 former Soviet citizens have emigrated to the United States. In the earlier part of the 1970's, this resettlement made barely noticeable changes in the general American population. The volume of immigration steadily increased, however, to a peak in 1979. In that year alone, almost 30,000 USSR refugees entered the United States.¹ This year, 1980, the emigration continues.

The impact of this latest Russian immigration is significant to selected communities, social service agencies, and ESL programs. Due to the sponsorship nature of resettlement procedures, urban areas such as Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Chicago, Houston and Pittsburgh have received a proportionately high number of refugees. New York City, long a traditional port of entry and initial immigrant resettlement area, now houses approximately 45% of the total number of arrivals.

The establishment of a new Russian emigre community in New York City is particularly evident. Two additional Russian-language publications have appeared on the newsstands in the past year; food stores, nightclubs,

¹Hebrew International Aid Society, "Statistical Abstracts," Fourth Quarter, 1979, p. 18. (Mimeographed.)

and restaurants cater to ethnic sub-groups among the immigrants (for example, Georgians, Uzbeks, Ukrainians). As well, ESL teachers have been starting to encounter increasing numbers of Russian speakers in their classrooms. Even though the number of Soviet emigre arrivals does not approach that of this country's largest immigrant group, the Spanish speakers of Caribbean, Latin and South American origins, the Soviet emigration does have a significant impact on ESL practices. Since this migration is one which encompasses all age groups, Russian-dominant speakers have been enrolling in all levels and types of ESL instruction: academic programs, in elementary and secondary schools (K-12) and in colleges and universities; pre-academic programs, special institutes for foreign university students; general purpose programs in vocational training, in technical institutes, junior colleges and community centers.

For most ESL teachers, encounters with the Soviet immigrants will be a new experience. Russian/Soviet emigration to the United States is divided into three chronological "waves." The first occurred at the beginning of this century, when about eight million Jews fled the pogroms of Tsar Alexander III; the second took place shortly after the 1917 Bolshevik revolution. A number of former Soviets, classified as "displaced persons," settled in the United States after World War II, but this contemporary migration, often called the "third

wave," is considerably greater.

Since the ESL population in American classrooms fluctuates with changing political and social conditions around the world, new teaching strategies and cultural insights must continually be added to the American ESL teacher's repertoire. The two basic areas in which Soviet emigre students differentiate themselves from others are, of course, in native language and culture.

First, from a linguistic standpoint, the interference and transference patterns of Russian-dominant speakers present some unique difficulties in the English language learning process. On the phonological level, the pure vowel system in Russian, the lack of diphthongs, the relatively small number of shared English/Russian phonemes and the high number of allophonic distributions reveal that listening comprehension and sound production exercises should be given special attention in the ESL curriculum. English/Russian syntactic differences are equally great. The alphabetic systems and even conventions of punctuation present further contrasts. It should be noted that all Soviet emigres have Russian as at least a second, spoken language; many are monolingual in Russian, while others are bilingual (Russian/Yiddish; Russian/Ukrainian; Russian/Georgian; Russian/Latvian). A certain number are tri- or multi-lingual, particularly those of Uzbek or Azerbaijani origin.

Second, and equally important, are the cultural

differences of the Soviet emigres. Although the Soviets, on the whole, present an urbanized, Westernized exterior, their life experience in a state-socialist society has left them ill equipped to deal with crucial aspects of everyday American life.

Since Russian and related languages are not often studied in the American educational system, many ESL teachers will be unfamiliar with details of the language background of the emigres. Similarly, American educators will not find literature on Soviet/American culture contrasts to be readily available. It is expected that, within the next few years, more studies on the Soviet immigration experience will help to fill the information gap. At present, written material on the immigration experience is produced by, and directed to, social work professionals. Studies tend to emphasize two points: the unpreparedness of emigres for the American social experience, and a reciprocal difficulty on the part of professionals to understand the cultural misperceptions of their clients.²

This project originated in an attempt to clarify my own experiences with Soviet emigres in the ESL classroom. It has grown out of two year's teaching experience with adult Soviet emigres, and has been supplemented by

²Lenore Parker, "From Paternalism to Pluralism: Soviet Emigres Bewildered by Contrasting Lifestyles," Foundation News, (September/October 1976), 38-43.

research from both readily available and private sources. Information sources include books, journal articles, conference presentations, and numerous personal interviews with emigres, social workers, and resettlement agencies' staff. In addition, general texts on Soviet institutions and daily life, the experience of Jews in the USSR, and sociological studies on Jewish assimilation in America have provided an historical and sociological context.

The project is intended as a handbook for ESL instructors. Rather than stand as a definitive text on the subject, its purpose is to present a range of options in English language learning activities designed for adult Soviet immigrants. All activities in section IV of the essay had been developed or adapted specifically for the needs of these students. Sections I, II, and III may be used as aids in the individual instructor's adaptation of curricula and in the preparation of relevant "culture capsules." One of the main objectives of these sections is to highlight Soviet/American lifestyle contrasts.

It is argued in this essay that the cultural misperceptions of Soviet emigres are specific to them as a group. Even though it has been estimated that 95% of the emigres claim Jewish "nationality" (in Soviet terminology) and identify themselves as Jewish, it has frequently been stated that American Jews have

found the Soviets to be more alien than kin.³ Despite the fact that members of the migration have come from 14 of the 15 republics in the Soviet Union, and thus represent differing regional backgrounds and ethnic groups, the standardization and implementation of Soviet social planning policies have produced a certain uniformity of perception of social roles, class and institutions among the immigrants.

Their pre-immigration experiences in the USSR determine the nature of their cultural transition here. It should be kept in mind that the Soviets, while Westernized, are an insular group, since travel to Western bloc countries, or even extensive travel within Socialist countries, is severely limited.

An additional factor distinguishes this group, and differentiates it from other contemporary migrations, such as the Cubans or Indochinese. According to demographic data, the Soviets are, by far, better-educated; they also classify themselves, on the whole, as having belonged to the higher economic/social class strata. These factors, considered in the context of their sponsored resettlement in the United States, qualitatively affect these immigrants' initial cultural preparedness for the American experience.

The structural principle underlying the five sections

³George E. Johnson, "Which Promised Land? The Realities of American Absorption of Soviet Jews," Analysis, No. 47 (November, 1974), 9.

of the essay is the attempt to introduce the ESL instructor to his/her future students before they arrive in the classroom. If, as Charles Curran writes, the learning process is facilitated when learners are known as "whole persons,"⁴ then information on the immigration process and prospects of the Soviets may provide a basis for the ESL teacher's understanding. There is a precis of Russian/English linguistic contrasts in section V, the concluding section of the project, so that this brief survey of "interference items" in the Soviet emigres' cultural transitions to America touches upon both the social and the linguistic realms.

⁴Charles A. Curran, Counseling-Learning in Second Languages (Apple River, Illinois: Apple River Press, 1976), p. 2.

Part I: Survival Skills in American ESL

As we know, adult ESL students have special needs. Their time is limited; the necessity to join the labor force and become self-supporting is often pressing. Those students already employed seek to better their occupational status through the acquisition and refinement of English language skills. All students, whether employed or not, tend to view the language learning process as one of the prerequisites, or means, to autonomy and self-sufficiency in this English-dominant society.

The care of a family is frequently included in the adult student's responsibilities. In the case of Soviet emigres, studies show that the average immigrant arrives in America as part of a family group; the overwhelming majority have been married and have children.⁵ In the group as a whole, women outnumber men slightly. Fifty-seven percent of the group classified themselves as having been full-time wage earners in the USSR; here, women are represented equally with men. Thus, working mothers and working single parents will comprise a significant part of the adult ESL population.

It is interesting that the demographic composition

⁵ Hebrew International Aid Society, "Statistical Abstracts," p. 16.

of this emigration has changed noticeably during the 1970's. A preponderance of younger, married people arrived in the earlier part of the decade; later, an older age group (retired persons and pensioners) have emigrated to join them. Some of these older immigrants resume their family responsibilities as practiced in traditional Soviet households, and take charge of household management and child care. An important focus in survival skills for these students would be consumerism and community services. Other retirees rejoin the labor force here. These students would benefit from survival skill activities centered on employment.

As Sharon Bassano argues in "ESL and the Cultural Transition of Non-Academic Adults,"⁶ the ESL teacher has a dual responsibility towards language learners:

Successful cultural transition for our immigrants is dependant upon their acquisition of specific language skills as well as skills related to survival--the management of day-to-day transactions and tasks concerning such things as work, family, law, consumerism, and health care. Because their ability to acquire these essential skills has a direct bearing on the personal and social adaptation they must make, our classes may help them to maintain more stable self-identities in the face of 'culture shock.'

She concludes with the assertion that cognitive skills (language learning per se) must be experienced in an American cultural context. Her approach, similar to the "Notional-Functional" school of thought, places

⁶Sharon Bassano, "ESL and the Cultural Transition of Non-Academic Adults," TESOL Newsletter, Vol. XIII, No. 4 (August 1979), 1.

emphasis on purposive language learning and speech acts. In this approach, grammar items are categorized and taught as functions in a real-life context, so that the learners receive immediate feedback from their speech production in a type of cause/effect relation. Also, items are grouped into specific fields, so that, for example, students acquire all WH-question forms in one lesson, given in the context of "asking for information."⁷

Even though in "ESL and the Cultural Transition of Non-Academic Adults" Bassano is articulating the perceived needs of "Third World" immigrants, her ideas are valid for Soviet ESL students. It will be seen that, on the one hand, Soviet emigres arrive equipped with a socialization that conflicts with their forthcoming American experience. Therefore, an ESL curriculum designed for these students must deal with potentially problematic areas of our lifestyle. On the other hand, from the perspective of classroom management and instructional efficiency we will find that Soviets' prior educational experiences in the USSR lead them to place great emphasis on the purposive and utilitarian aspects of learning. Survival skill activities and certain teaching methods will then be both relevant and adequate to many Soviet emigres' expectations and needs.

On a more general level, survival skill activities

⁷see Leo Jones, Notions in English (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, England, 1979).

in English language learning help to ease the transition for various types of non-native speakers. Another instance of the survival skill mode designed for an entirely different, cohesive group is that developed by Frentzen and Tirone for foreign graduate students in an American university.⁸ Here, the emphasis is on community, university, and study skill orientation, and the students are introduced to community services, the university library, the American style of citation, footnoting, and paraphrase, among other areas.

Survival skill activities are important, and perhaps crucial, in our approach to ESL instruction precisely because the institution of education is one of the only ones which most immigrants encounter in their initial American experience. Unlike other countries whose population base is constantly expanded by immigration (Israel, for example), the United States has not developed a comprehensive retraining or acculturation program. The new arrival is generally left to his/her own devices, unless, like the Soviets, the immigrant is sponsored by a voluntary agency or by individuals. The debacle of the recent Cuban migrant resettlement attempts reveals the lack of Federal policies, strategies, and programs in this area. Thus, the ESL instructor's role

⁸see Anne Frentzen and Pat Tirone, "Meeting Foreign Student Needs in the University ESL Course," (Paper presented at the 1980 N.Y.S.E.S.O.L.B.E.A. conference, New York City, Friday, October 24, 1980).

may sometimes overlap that of the professional resettlement counselor. The adoption of this dual role may arise out of necessity, since our adult educational system often serves as the only retraining or acculturation program accessible to immigrants. In other instances, such involvement by the teacher may be the result of a conscious choice, when the teacher puts the "Community Counseling-Learning" method into practice.⁹

Survival skill activities in ESL instruction reflect a necessary concern with assimilation strategies. When grammar items are presented or reinforced by these activities, learners acquire the tools of the language at the same time that they practice simulated everyday social transactions.

What is a survival skill? At the most basic level, a survival skill may be the ability to comprehend public information signs: Don't Walk; Danger; Do Not Enter; No Smoking. More sophisticated language concepts, combined with knowledge of the protocol specific to varying social situations are, however, necessary for an individual to function independently. Thus, social transactions such as renting an apartment, finding a job, or opening a bank account can also be classified as survival skills. This second type of transaction requires the use of judgment and the action of evaluation on the part of the individual. These transactions, common to everyday life in America and certainly relevant to immigrants,

⁹see Charles A. Curran, Counseling-Learning in Second Languages.

also require prior knowledge of the options open at every stage in the process. Those immigrants whose previous social experience provides no background in this type of transaction will be ill prepared to function autonomously, or to act in their own self-interest.

A common complaint voiced by Soviet emigres reveals their bewilderment when confronted by the complexities of American society: "I expected it to be just like Russia."¹⁰ Unlike other immigrant groups from industrialized, Westernized countries, the Soviets in America encounter a basic difference which underlies all social structures and contravenes their prior experience in a developed society. In brief, institutions and social transactions are regulated by a "free enterprise" principle in America, since our society is characterized by decentralization of governmental authority, and by a correlatively low incidence of planned social policy. In the Soviet Union, on the other hand, several comparable institutions and instances of social relations are determined by the policies of the state socialist system. There are, of course, many areas in everyday Soviet life where the individual exercises options of choice, engages in private enterprise, negotiates deals, and may own private property, among other examples of types of "free

¹⁰Lenore Parker, "From Paternalism to Pluralism," 40.

enterprise."¹¹ The survival skill activities in section IV of this project are addressed specifically to those areas in which Soviet and American experience diverge sharply.

It may be difficult for an American to grasp how a disparity in the economic and/or ideological base of a nation can be so unilaterally reflected in the interactions of everyday life, but this is indeed the case. This statement is not meant to imply that all American/Soviet contrasts arise from a simple opposition of capitalist and socialist ways of living. Instead, it is the historical particularity of the Soviet system that is being contrasted with the American one.

Another series of examples could be drawn from the experiences of contemporary Swedish, French, or British migrants to the United States. These three countries of origin operate under a range of social democratic to parliamentary governments. All provide their citizens with social services that are comparable to each other, but distinctly different from those found in America. In the case of these immigrant groups, cultural transition information would have to include contrasts of a national health service with private medical practice and private health insurance, widespread

¹¹see Robert A. Osborn, Soviet Social Policies: Welfare, Equality, and Community (Homewood, Illinois: The Dorsey Press, 1970).

versus restricted family subsidies and daycare, as well as federal, subsidized higher education versus public and private higher education funded by public and private income sources.

The scope of the public sector in the USSR is far broader than that found in any of the previous examples. Activities which in America are viewed as the responsibility or prerogative of the individual or of the family as an economic unit, are, in the Soviet Union, encompassed by the state apparatus. Therefore, each of the sample survival skill activities in section IV will be prefaced by a brief explanation of the contrasting Soviet experience in the particular social situation. The following topics have been incorporated into survival skill activities: housing; employment; money management; consumerism; community services.

Part II: An Introduction to the Soviet Immigrants

The arrival of the Soviet immigrant in America, and her/his subsequent immersion in our social system, often constitutes a rude awakening to the realities of distinct differences. Even though all immigrants experience a degree of "culture shock" when they encounter the American lifestyle, a factor which particularizes the Soviets' reaction is their immigration route itself. The ESL teacher's familiarity with their immigration process can be helpful, since the teacher may be the first American professional whom the immigrants meet on a day-to-day basis during their initial transition period.

It is significant that the Soviets' migration procedures mirror and actually extend aspects of the Soviet lifestyle beyond the borders of their homeland. The Soviet Jews are assisted by a world-wide relief organization, the Hebrew International Aid Society (HIAS). Two-thirds of the total cost of transport across Europe and the Atlantic, of interim living accommodations, of food and personal expenses, of medical care, and of baggage shipping are underwritten by HIAS. One-third of the costs are paid out of funds appropriated by the U.S. Congress for the purposes of

"transportation and maintenance for Russian emigres en route to countries other than Israel."¹² Rome, Italy is the site of the resettlement agencies' interim headquarters. All emigres who do not elect to repatriate to Israel undergo their initial processing at this center. Due to the large number of emigres and to difficulties in triage, a typical immigrant may remain at the center for one to six months.

Upon arrival in the United States, emigres' comprehensive aid and assistance is assumed by affiliated voluntary Jewish agencies, such as the Jewish Family Service and the New York Association for New Americans. These organizations provide emigres with translation assistance, caseworkers, housing referrals, vocational placement, subsidized health insurance, medical and dental care, and preliminary English language instruction. The period of transitional aid may be brief; it generally is not extended over one year's time. It can easily be seen that this immigration experience is in direct contrast to that of other contemporary, and earlier, immigrant groups.¹³ Therefore, the ESL instructor should keep in mind that the substitution of individual initiative for institutional aid in America is, in some respects, a new and untested concept for the Soviets.

¹²George E. Johnson, "Which Promised Land?" 9.

¹³see Thomas C. Wheeler, ed., The Immigrant Experience (Penguin Books: New York, 1979)

Their immigration experience is characterized by other factors. First, great publicity has surrounded this mass movement. It has been the subject of international advocacy for several years. The "Free Soviet Jewry Movement" was established in the United States as early as 1963.¹⁴ The Movement, along with international coalitions of supporters, the Western press, and members of the United States government have given the issue of unrestricted Soviet Jewish migration the status of a cause celebre.¹⁵

The United States government has been indirectly involved in aiding this emigration since 1963, when President John F. Kennedy first authorized the appropriation of funds for their resettlement in Israel. In 1973, Attorney General John Mitchell extended the Immigration and Naturalization Service's parole authority to include Soviet immigrants. This action exempted the Soviets from United States' immigration quota restrictions, so that they were able to enter this country in the protected category of "political refugee." As a result, the level of Soviet emigration to America increased dramatically. By 1977, 50% of all Soviets holding exit visas stamped "In Transit to Israel" opted not to repatriate there. In 1979, the percentage rose to 65%; of these, 85% chose

¹⁴William W. Orbach, The American Movement to Aid Soviet Jews (University of Massachusetts Press: Amherst, 1979), p. 20.

¹⁵Ibid.

to settle in the United States.¹⁶

Since reports of advocacy and aid did reach Soviet citizenry, the Soviet immigrants were not unaware of the "Free Soviet Jewry Movement." The reporter Faubion Bowers, among others, comments on the resultant heightened expectations of Soviet emigres to America:

They left the Soviet Union as heroes. Many of them received funds from American sympathizers, and this ... helped support them during the dark days of tuneyadstvo, or parasitism, into which they were forced after applying for an exit visa. Letters and telegrams from abroad had poured in, foreign newsmen had interviewed them; people in New York and elsewhere had marched in the streets for them...Over and over again, the immigrants ask how the American government could 'invite' them here and yet not provide jobs for them...¹⁷

Literature on the Soviets' transition experience in America frequently emphasizes their difficulty in adjusting from "celebrity status" to that of "modest refugee."¹⁸ This conflict between expectation and reality is sometimes articulated in harshly negative assessments of the American way of life. The trauma of migration is thus complicated by the immigrant's self-perception as a victim of discrimination in the new homeland. Precisely what s/he elected to escape through migration is apparently replicated in the initial

¹⁶Hebrew International Aid Society, "Statistical Abstracts," p. 1.

¹⁷Faubion Bowers, "Only and Lonely in America," New York Times Sunday Magazine, September 26, 1976, pp. 18-19.

¹⁸George E. Johnson, "Which Promised Land?" 10.

American experience.

When America in actuality is not what it was in the immigrant's "mental utopia,"¹⁹ it is often not the dream that is jettisoned, but merely the content of its images. In my own experience with Soviet ESL students, I found much evidence of these processes of disillusion and despair. For example, if I attempted to put the adjective "expensive" into circulation in the context of our shared daily lives, I would produce examples such as: "The subway fare is expensive," or "Meat is expensive." Invariably, students would protest, in chorus, "No, no. Expensive for immigrants. Expensive for us."

This particular misperception is based on two factors. One is an uncritical recollection of the Soviet system of the "social wage." Under this system, the actual take-home pay of all wage earners is quite low by American standards. A correlatively low cost of living, supported by subsidies and price controls, is considered to be an additional component of workers' wages. Consumer necessities, housing, public transportation, education, health care, family services, and cultural activities are available to Soviet citizens at little or no cost. In the United States, of course, an individual's buying power is determined solely by the strength of her or his

¹⁹Robert J. Osborn, "The Soviet Social Environment and American Contrasts," (mimeographed paper presented at the "A New Language, A New Culture" Federation of Jewish Philanthropies conference, New York City, Monday, February 11, 1980), p. 87.

earning power. Therefore, if Soviet immigrants make an unmediated comparison between the price of public transport here and in their homeland, for example, they conclude that people like themselves, with a small income, are at a distinct disadvantage in our inflationary economy.

A second factor influences these immigrants' self-perceptions as subjects of unwarranted discrimination in America. This is their impression of the lavish wages paid to engineers, skilled workers, and professionals in the United States. It is not incorrect to assume that certain occupational categories here are distinguished by high salaries, or that high wages are necessary for a "comfortable" life in America. Many Soviet immigrants, however, expect a quick re-entry into their former profession or trade. They are burdened by the often mistaken belief that they may easily acquire a professional or social status analogous to that held in the Soviet Union; the only difference which is expected is that of a quantum leap in salary. Immigrants may then express impatience or suspicion when they learn that cultural transition or vocational retraining is necessary to secure such positions.

Additional disappointments become manifest because some job skills may not be at all transferable to the American workplace. These problems may be compounded by insufficient English language skills. Furthermore,

a scarcity of professional job opportunities may add to an already lengthy and difficult job search, as does the oversupply of candidates in a particular field (university teaching, for example) where little or no immediate possibility for employment exists.

Lenore Parker describes the immigrants' expectations and disappointments:

Because of the worldwide publicity...given to the movement to persuade the Soviet Union to permit free emigration, they feel they are uniquely wanted by this country. They feel they have not escaped, as the German Jews did; they have made a choice, involving some sacrifices ...They expect to be rewarded. This expectation is strengthened by the way the Soviet government treats defectors to the USSR. Americans and Europeans who have chosen the Soviet Union have been richly and publicly received--given excellent housing, placed in high-paying jobs. The Soviet emigre expects the same reasoning to apply here.²⁰

Rather than participating in what sociologists term the immigrants' "cult of gratitude,"²¹ the Soviets may instead, unrealistically but quite understandably, express disgruntlement at the unfavorable reception they perceive here. Since English language proficiency is one of the major barriers to assimilation, ESL instructors will hear similar expressions of dissatisfaction in their encounters with Soviet emigre students.

A second factor that distinguishes this group from

²⁰Lenore Parker, "From Paternalism to Pluralism," 39.

²¹Melvin Tumin, "Some Unapplauded Consequences of Social Mobility in a Mass Society," Social Forces, No. 36 (October, 1957), 32-37.

other mass migrations is the relatively high proportion of "white collar" and professional persons. In 1979, for example, professionals in medicine, the humanities, the arts, and the sciences made up 26% of all Soviet arrivals. The educational level of emigres is correspondingly high, with approximately half of the total adult group in 1979 classified as possessing the equivalent of a bachelor's degree.²² Nevertheless, the percentage of immigrants arriving with functional English language skills is low. In the Soviet Union, German as a foreign language appears to be taught more frequently than is English. Also, foreign language instruction priorities in the USSR assign oral skills a low status. British English, rather than American Standard, is the dialect of choice in schools and in the production of grammar texts. Emigres with this British English language background face an additional slight interference problem in matters of vocabulary and syntax.

Soviet immigrants do have some demonstrable advantages over other contemporary groups in comparable situations. As we have seen, their migration does not entail personal financial expenditures, nor is an encounter with actual physical danger a real possibility. Their entry into the United States, and their continuing alien status, is legal and assured by the parole authority first accorded to

²²Hebrew International Aid Society, "Statistical Abstracts," p. 17.

them in 1973.

An American sociologist of immigration, Colin Greer, has isolated several factors in the pre-immigration experience that promote successful transition and assimilation. These are useful categories in which to analyze the Soviet immigration experience.²³ First, the overwhelming majority of Soviets have migrated from urban centers in the USSR, rather than from villages or agricultural areas. Their adjustment to American big city life is thereby facilitated by their prior experience.

Second, most of the immigrants come from what we would call the "middle class." Since their class allegiance, and concomittant value system, accords in general with that of mainstream America, their advancement to an equivalent social position should be quicker than it would be for former members of the peasantry or aristocracy of an underdeveloped nation.

Third, a number of immigrants in the group arrive in America equipped with a form of capital (gold, for example). Since the waiting period for USSR exit visa approval may extend to over one year, emigres are able to convert their assets (televisions, cars, motorcycles, cooperative apartments, houses) into smaller, potentially

²³see Colin Greer, "Remembering Class," in Divided Society: The Ethnic Experience in America, ed. by Colin Greer (Basic Books: New York, 1974), pp. 3-35.

exportable forms. Those fortunate enough to have smuggled their assets past the USSR customs then arrive here freed from the handicap of initial destitution. Education can also be categorized as a type of capital, and the emigres are a highly educated group.

Fourth, the Soviet immigrants consider themselves to be permanent arrivals. As even the application for a USSR exit visa provoked recriminations, the emigres, on the whole, do not regard reverse migration to be feasible. They are unlike other immigrant groups whose tenure in this country has been initially determined by a specific, time-limited goal: acquisition of job skills or education; monetary gain. The emigres have a stake in America, and motivation to achieve a successful cultural transition.

Like other immigrant groups, the Soviets have started to establish distinctive residence patterns and their own community orientation. While they have been welcomed, and supported, by the general Jewish American community, the Soviets still experience a group identity. In New York City, three areas are distinguished by a large population of emigres: Brighton Beach, Brooklyn (called "Little Odessa"), Greater Forest Hills, Queens; Inwood, Manhattan. Ethnic allegiances and institutions are being maintained within the mainstream society. In some cases, the ESL classroom will be one of the only sources of students' direct involvement in the American language and lifestyle.

A growing number of emigre-managed small business attests to the transferability of entrepreneurial skills to a new culture. This phenomenon shows that, for all their differences, one segment of the emigre population is repeating the history of earlier groups: that is, the consolidation of a first-generation small business class whose clientele is drawn primarily from the first-generation itself.²⁴ The job prospects of emigres whose training lies in the professional, technical, and service fields, however, are not as favorable. They must compete for positions in the mainstream American community.

In an extremely perceptive analysis, Lois Morton isolates factors which contribute to these emigres' difficulties.²⁵ In brief, intellectual laborers, more than manual ones, need advanced English language skills in order to reenter their occupations in the United States. Since financial necessity most often precludes exclusive or intensive language study, most emigres must, at least temporarily, enter the job market in subsistence-wage or low status occupations which require little knowledge of English. The idea of "working oneself up the job ladder," or "tiding oneself over" is an American cultural commonplace. It does not, however,

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵see Lois Morton, "Overcoming Culture Shock in the Job Market: An ESL Approach," (mimeographed paper presented at the 1979 T.E.S.O.L. conference, Boston).

ring true to the Soviets, for this concept of upward mobility cannot be validated by their prior experiences.

It must be remembered that these immigrants arrive with specific expectations which were fostered partly by the Soviets' own perceived roles and status in the homeland. Furthermore, our government, through the content of "Radio Free Europe" broadcasts, provided an often illusory reinforcement to the Soviets' American "mental utopia." In general, Soviet citizens seem to be more wary of ideological manipulation of the news media than are their American counterparts. USSR news sources are then read for a double meaning, so that reports in Pravda and other official organs on American inflation, widespread unemployment, and recession are then considered to be, at best, exaggerations, and, at worst, lies. Former Soviets who opt to emigrate to America are certainly among those who have placed their faith in the pro-American side in the media struggles of propaganda and counter-propaganda.

As Lois Morton suggests, if the emigres have brought nothing else in their ideological baggage with them to America, they have come with an expectation of freedom. Freedom here, nonetheless, has added dimensions to it which would be inconceivable in the Soviet social experience. "Coming from countries where everything from cradle to grave--housing, education, medical care, and employment--is taken care of, it is hard for them

to understand that freedom does not mean life as they knew it, with greater freedom, but rather freedom to fend for themselves--to have job interviews instead of jobs, competition instead of security, a disinterested government instead of a controlling one. They can say what they please, but nobody listens. And there is no job, on a list, waiting for them."²⁶

The particular areas in which Soviet emigres experience disappointment, confusion, and trauma are, in short, embodied in those social institutions wherein the American and the Soviet practice differ sharply. They are: bureaucracy; employment; consumerism; health services; housing; education. As Robert Osborn notes in his article "The Soviet Social Environment and American Contrasts," the "survival kit"²⁷ of the average Soviet citizen is based on a lifetime's experience in a divergent social system. If a survival skills mode is to meet the needs of Soviet immigrant ESL students, it must necessarily address those 'blind spots' symptomatic both of the reality of a Soviet's life experience, and of the "mental utopia" of expectations.

²⁶Ibid, p. 2.

²⁷Robert J. Osborn, "The Soviet Social Environment," p. 89.

Part III: Methods of Teaching and Learning

The ESL teacher must often restrict the almost limitless possibilities of cultural material to a selected few. Having taken the Soviets' immigration experience into account, two priorities emerge within the context of an adult basic education ESL course. One is the development of communicative competence in the survival skill mode. The other is the clarification of attitudes, traditions, and practices specific to American social roles.

When the social, or survival, purpose of language use is reinforced in a situational context, the simulated situations themselves implicitly provide cultural information to the students. It is clear that when an individual works through a problem, the solution achieved is often better internalized, and longer retained in the memory. The solution, as a product of the individual's intellectual processes, is not merely a ready-made concept having no relation to the active investment of mental energy. While memorization and rote learning are indeed necessary components of adult second language acquisition, classroom activities which stimulate analysis or evaluation are preferred.

This dichotomy between analytical and rote learning

is, I believe, at the basis of Gattegno's theories of language acquisition. In the initial stages of "Silent Way" teaching and learning, many linguistic concepts or items are arrived at by students' employment of analytical, intuitionist, or associational means; the concepts or items are cued by the instructor and embodied in concrete symbolic systems (such as rods or charts). The payment of an "ogden"²⁸ is required for those items that cannot be efficiently symbolized. In other words, an act of forced or deliberate memorization is necessary only in cases where the "Silent Way" means of analysis, association or symbolic correlation would be fruitless.

Even though a survival skill curriculum has little direct relation to "Silent Way" methods and materials, the underlying principle of students' intellectual or judgmental involvement is the same. It may be simpler and less time-consuming to tell students about job-hunting techniques, for example. It will not be, however, as effective as a series of several activities in which the same information is acted out, thought through, or evaluated by the participants. Therefore, hypothesis-testing and problem-solving activities have been given emphasis in the development of survival skill materials.

In addition, cultural material incorporated into problem-solving and hypothesis-testing activities is not

²⁸Caleb Gattegno, The Common Sense of Teaching Foreign Languages, (Educational Solutions: New York, 1976), pp. 27-29.

given to the students in the form of ready-made concepts. The judgmental activity of the intellect is important in all learning, and, for all varieties of ESL students. In the case of Soviet students, blanket statements about social practice and living conditions in America should be avoided. As we have seen regarding attitudes toward the USSR media, many Soviets tend not to unilaterally take factually presented items at face value. Analysts of the Soviet emigration process have noted as well that American professionals (social workers and teachers, for example) have been regarded as employees of a state bureaucracy.²⁹ The Soviets, relying on their prior experiences, may respond with an initial lack of trust. It is better teaching practice and policy to create learning situations in which the students will think for themselves. If materials related to real life are graded to the students' level of linguistic competence, students' own evaluative faculties will be used without excessive guidance from the teacher. Guidance, instead, should take the form of carefully designed materials with explicit, step-by-step instructions and clearly demarcated time or task accomplishment limits.

In "Developing Communicative Competence,"³⁰ Christina

²⁹Robert J. Osborn, "The Soviet Social Environment," pp.97-98.

³⁰Christina Bratt Paulston, "Developing Communicative Competence," in Classroom Practices in Adult ESL, ed. by Donna Ilyin and Thomas Tragardh (TESOL: Washington, D.C., 1978), p. 111-118.

Bratt Paulston emphasizes that once the basic skill stage is mastered, the "social purpose of language" must come to the forefront in the ESL class. In other words, students do not become effective communicators by the time they have mastered appropriate English forms and tactics in reading, writing, listening comprehension and oral production. These skills have to be reinforced, and given depth, in real-life functions and contexts. Then, the students extend their proficiency from the level of linguistic to the level of social performance.

In social performance, a change in situation is induced, information is gained, or action is motivated by verbal input. As opposed to pattern practice or transformational exercises, ESL activities promoting communicative competence have social interaction as their goal. Thus, many of the survival skill tasks in section IV of this essay are based on a crucial information gap, so that practice in asking questions or in discussing options is purposeful.

Paulston advocates four types of communicative activities: role play; dialog; problem-solving task; community focused project. Each of these suggested types involves, and even demands, interchange between individuals. Each is open to variation and expansion. Since language in action outside the classroom is full of variety and surprises, the activities provide training in the flexibility required by speakers in real-life,

open-ended communication.

Paulston's four suggested activity types promote a measure of student autonomy and self-direction within the class. This is important for efficient language learning in the context of adult learners and survival skill techniques. When the tasks are to be put into practice in a class of adult Soviet emigres, specific preparation is required. First of all, we must confront our own, culturally specific, attitudes towards the teaching and learning processes. We must clarify what constitutes a classroom, what identifies a teacher, and what defines productive learning activity. We will find that our own attitudes may have changed with the times, and that they are indeed products of historical, scientific, and social forces.

In contrast with ours, Soviet educational practice is characterized by a preponderance of rote learning and by a highly structured, formal class environment. Many older Soviet emigre students have been known to stand up when attendance is being taken, or when they are asked to respond in class. A student-centered or relatively informal class atmosphere will be bewildering, at first, in the ESL class. Such an atmosphere may even be openly criticized by the students as frivolous, since it does not correspond to their expectations of regimentation and teacher's authoritarianism.

The Soviet educational system is partially modeled

after Western European ones. On the pre-university level, a standard, compulsory curriculum is taught throughout the republics. "Tracking" is accomplished by nationwide examinations which are administered at the eighth grade level; students are channeled into university preparation, technical institutes, or vocational training. This situation of triage is unlike that prevailing in the United States today, where the pursuit of higher education resembles a consumer's activity within which all students, given appropriate financial circumstances, can participate in a form of higher education. The Soviets in America notice very quickly that circumstance, rather than selection, can determine the composition of the classroom population. Accustomed to a type of merit system, they tend to discount the value of an education that is theoretically available to all.

Classroom protocol is also quite different in the Soviet environment. Formality in manner and discipline in behavior are considered to be norms. Oral recapitulation of assigned material is an expected part of students' classroom performance.³¹ In addition, the relation of social institutions to the educational process is conceived in another manner. The responsibility

³¹"Why Ivan and Tanya Can Read," Time Magazine, June 23, 1980, pp. 24-25.

for students' successful learning is placed upon the teachers, and, in the case of children, also upon the parents.³² Here in the United States, a much greater emphasis has been assigned to the students' role in the acquisition of knowledge. Therefore, when Soviet emigre students describe their American teacher as "good," they may not be referring to clarity of exposition, excellence of materials, or competence in the classroom. It is more likely that they are signaling that they feel they have been taught a sufficient number of skills.

Some of our contemporary approaches to teaching are based on psychological methods and principles which call for an integration of the teacher/learner roles. In the "Community Counseling-Learning" method, for example, the instructor acts as a facilitator who consciously abdicates the role of authority in the classroom. Similarly, a teacher in the "Silent Way" withdraws from the leading role, and increases the demands on the students' analytical abilities and oral production. The emphasis on student-initiated activity, along with that on group dynamism and group work, is alien to Soviets' prior classroom language learning experiences. An ESL instructor may find that activities which appear to her/him as both natural and stimulating to the learning process may not

³²Ibid.

be as readily accepted or enjoyed by Soviet emigres. Instead, the students may be frustrated and confused by what they perceive as a lack of structure and rigor in the learning environment. Therefore, when games, role-play, pair practice or other small group activities are introduced, the teacher should take the time to explain the underlying purpose or grammatical point of such tasks.

To be effectively incorporated into the students' changing sense of self in a new language environment, work in the classroom should accomodate the students' prior life experiences. Further, the work should be relevant to projected situations and encounters in the outside world. The survival skill activities which follow have been designed with those prerequisites in mind. As Caleb Gattegno writes, teachers must recognize language learners as "persons capable of seeing that much can be inferred, deduced, generalized, combined, extended and thus, persons capable of extending their time far beyond the hours of direct involvement in the learning."³³ The survival skill activities in section IV may be considered in an analogous fashion, since some of them have been adapted, or inspired by, well-known classroom practices. All have been designed, or redesigned, for a particular group of ESL participants, and may be, by the reader, further adapted to suit the needs of a specific ESL class.

³³Caleb Gattegno, Common Sense, p. 12.

Part IV: Survival Skill Activities

1. EMPLOYMENT

Activity A "Reading the Classifieds: A Card Game"

Introductory Observations: The American job market is one of the areas of greatest disparity between pre- and post-immigration experience. The USSR still suffers from a labor shortage, with the result that industries and firms compete for employees.

Job hunting through newspaper ads or resume mailings does not exist, as such, in the USSR. Instead, several agencies or institutions control most vocational placement. In each of the fifteen republics, the "State Committee for the Use of Labor Resources" functions as a clearinghouse for skilled worker positions. The majority of university graduates, technical institute and middle school graduates are placed in their first jobs by assignment agencies, or by government ministries. Much of this planning is done to ensure adequate staffing in underdeveloped and developing regions of the Soviet Union. It is incorrect to imply, as Lois Morton does, that Soviet job seekers merely consult lists in order to find available positions. It is true, however, that

active recruitment through a type of advertising is done in certain instances; "hardship" placements in the labor-hungry and remote regions of Siberia and Tadjikstan are publicized, as are the enticements of bonus pay and superior grade housing which accompany them.³⁴

The classified ad category of the American job market is certainly a foreign entity to Soviet emigres. Work is considered a social duty and a citizen's right in the Soviet Union, therefore it is difficult for them to adjust to a manner of advertising in which employment is presented in the same way as are used cars and consumer products.

Materials and Instructions: Activity A

Game components consist of (1) a deck of 52 cards, and (2) a reference sheet of classified ad abbreviations. The game demands the following skills: reading; speaking; use of a reference sheet; knowledge of alphabetical order; individual participation and evaluation.

"Reading the Classifieds" is an adaptation of a commercially produced ESL verb tense game, "Check the Deck!" Up to eight students can play this version; each player attempts to complete sets of job ads. There are thirteen sets of four identical ads each.

³⁴Robert J. Osborn, Soviet Social Policies, pp. 177-178.

After dealing out six to eight cards (depending on the number of players), leave the remainder of the deck face down. The first player starts to collect sets of cards by addressing another player by name and asking for a specific job title. If the second player has one or more of the requested cards, s/he relinquishes it after asking for identifying information, such as "What is the salary?" or "Is it full-time?". If the player has none of the desired cards, s/he says "Check the deck," and the first player picks from the deck. When the first player succeeds in collecting cards, s/he gets another turn. If not, play passes to the next person.

A teacher can make up cards appropriate to the occupational concerns of the class. The following categories are suggested: mechanic, structural engineer, lab technician, computer operator, salesperson, store manager, bookkeeper, draftsman.

A card might look like this:

AUTO MECHANIC

Exp nec. Knowl. of foreign cars.
F/T. Brooklyn. \$250 wk. Call
634-2251

Classified Ad Abbreviations

E: East
 ed: education
 emplmnt: employment
 Eng: English
 E/O: equal opportunity employer
 eve: evening
 exp: experience
 expd: experienced

figs: figures
 flr: floor
 F/P: fee paid
 F/T: full-time

gd: good
 genl: general
 grad: graduate
 grt: great

hi: high
 hosp: hospital
 hrs: hours
 hrly: hourly
 HS: high school

imm: immediate
 inc: including
 individ: individual
 info: information
 int'l: international

K: thousand
 knowl: knowledge

lic: license
 lite: light
 loc: location
 lrn: learn

M: thousand
 mag: magazine
 max: maximum
 mech: mechanic
 M-F: Monday through Friday
 M/F: male or female
 min: minimum
 mo: month

nds: needs
 nec: necessary
 nr: near

ofc: office
 oppy: opportunity

pd: paid
 P/T: part-time

qualif: qualified,
 qualification

refs: references
 req'd: required

sal: salary
 St: street

tech: technical,
 technician
 trnee: trainee

w/: with
 wk: week
 wkly: weekly
 wntd: wanted

x: extension

yr: year

Activity B "Resume Writing: Fill in the Blanks"

Introductory Observations: Lengthy tenure in one position, or with one employer, is not unusual in the USSR. Here, vertical mobility through frequent job changes characterizes the working experience of many Americans, particularly in the "white-collar" fields. The CV or resume is unfamiliar to emigres.

Materials and Instructions: Activity B

This fill-in activity is fairly elementary as a writing exercise, but it provides exposure to a simplified job application or resume form. If the students are actually planning a job search, the teacher might suggest that they memorize the information involved. In Activity D, "The Job Interview," the same information will be reinforced.

RESUME FORM

I am _____ years old.

I attended the _____ school
institute from _____ to _____.
university

I received a _____ degree. I studied _____.

From _____ to _____, I worked at the _____.

My job title was _____.

The American equivalent is _____.

My duties included _____.

I have on-the-job experience in _____.

Activity C "Telephone Talk: Tape Response"

Introductory Observations: Communication by telephone, unguided by the facial cueing of person-to-person contact, is one of the most difficult tasks for second language learners. Since job hunting in the United States is often a matter of individual initiative, practice in telephone talk is essential. The conventions of greeting and salutation over the telephone, of course, differ from country to country. It should be noted that the Russian style of stating a street address is the reverse of ours: that is, area or city--street--house number.

Materials and Instructions: Activity C

Longman Publisher's new workbook and tape set, "It's Up to You,"³⁵ is highly recommended for use in ESL courses concentrating in vocational preparation. This exercise is an adaptation of one of their many valuable activities. The procedure employed in this task is tape response, so that listening comprehension and impromptu repetition are tested.

ON THE TELEPHONE

Instructions to the students: It is important to show

³⁵ Joanne Dresner, Kenneth Beck, Clare Morgano and Luise Custer, It's Up to You (New York: Longman, 1980).

that you have correctly heard information in a telephone conversation. Listen to this tape of a conversation between an employer and Maria. You will hear how Maria repeats addresses, and other items, while she writes them down on paper. When Americans repeat numbers and names, we start the phrase with "That's."

Listen to the tape once. First you will hear the whole conversation. Turn off the tape player, and discuss what you have heard. Who is talking? What are their names? What are they talking about? Play the tape again, and write down the information which is important to Maria. Then play the next part of the tape. You will hear the employer say the same words, but you must say Maria's words. After you have spoken, you will hear Maria's response on the tape.

DIALOG

E: Hello. Pachulski's Fabric Store.
 M: Hello. May I speak with Mrs. Pachulski?
 E: Speaking. Who's calling?
 M: This is Maria Costa.
 E: Are you calling about the job?
 M: Yes, I am.
 E: Can you come to see me at 5 o'clock today?
 M: Yes, I can. That's 5 o'clock?
 E: Yes. The address is 122 Broome Street.

M: That's ONE-TWENTY-TWO Broome Street?

E: Yes. When you come, ask for Mrs. Morvy.

M: Will you spell the name, please?

E: That's M O R V Y.

M: That's M O R V Y.

E: Fine. Good-bye.

M: Good-bye.

Activity D "The Job Interview: Oral Pair Practice"

Materials and Instructions: Activity D

Common interview questions are written on index cards. Students separate into pairs, they practice and exchange roles. Rearrangement of the cards will make the exercise slightly more difficult, so that students run through the cards in different orders. If the group is not very advanced, the questions can be written in two identical columns on a sheet of paper. The sheet is then folded outwards. This enables the interviewee to read the questions also, and gain vocabulary cues from the questions.

QUESTIONS

Would you spell your name, please?
 How old are you?
 Are you married?
 How long have you been studying English?
 How good is your English?
 Have you held a job like this before?
 Are you able to work overtime?
 Do you have a driver's license?
 Do you think you can do this kind of work?
 When can you start working?

Activity E "Salary, Seniority, Job Protocol: A Dialog"

Introductory Observations: Pay scales are fairly standardized throughout the Soviet Union. All workers in a job category, regardless of locality or tenure, earn an approximately equal wage. This prior experience causes the American seniority system to seem discriminatory to new employees, i.e. immigrants.

It is interesting to note that the criterion of supervisory 'answerability' also appears quite different from a Soviet perspective. Since the employer there is the state, a worker's immediate supervisor does not wield the same power in controlling either the promotion, demotion, or firing of the employee.

Materials and Instructions: Activity E

Vocabulary in context includes: payday, paycheck, pay/salary, raise, find out, make money, have to, get a raise. Grammar points in the dialog include: contractions, comparatives, short answers. The setting: Yefim (a Soviet immigrant) meets his neighbor, Gregorio, on the stairs.

DIALOG

G: What's the matter, Yefim? You look angry.

Y: I am. Today was payday, and I found out that I make less than the other workers in my shop.

G: Do you all do the same job, and work the same number of hours?

- Y: Yes, we all work 40 hours a week. And I think that I work harder than the others.
- G: You only started working two weeks ago, didn't you?
- Y: That's right.
- G: Yefim, the other people have worked there much longer. You're getting a starting salary.
- Y: You mean there is a special salary for new employees?
- G: Yes, a starting salary. You will probably get more money, a raise in pay, after 6 months.
- Y: I think I won't work so hard if I only get a starting salary.
- G: Don't do that! If you don't do a good job, the boss can fire you. Then you won't have any salary at all. But if the boss sees that you work harder than the other employees, he can give you a raise earlier.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

1. Describe your own, or a friend's or relative's, first on-the-job experience in America.
2. Yefim must explain to his wife, Alla, why he gets a lower salary than do his colleagues. Write a dialog for Yefim and Alla.

Activity F "Relocation: Reading Comprehension"

Introductory Observations: The contrast between Soviet job stability and the free-wheeling employment mobility of Americans should be emphasized. "Working oneself up" here often entails (1) accepting a low-grade job in hopes of promotion or (2) relocating to a region where jobs are available. The fact that internal population in the USSR is controlled by residency permits can be compared with the well publicized movements of the American labor force in search of better employment.

Materials and Instructions: Activity F

The reading passage (low intermediate level) is followed by detail questions, inference questions, and vocabulary testing in context.

THE SUNBELT

Arizona, Nevada, and New Mexico are called the "Sunbelt" states. They all have a dry, sunny, and warm climate during the winter and summer. Many manufacturing companies have moved there from the colder states in the American Northeast.

Businessmen say that the warm and sunny weather is good for business. Here in the "Sunbelt" there are no snowstorms. Heating and electricity costs are lower.

Many employees are following their companies to the

"Sunbelt." Unemployed people, or people who are looking for better jobs, are also going to these states. Jim and Carol Razinski are young people who have recently moved to the "Sunbelt" city of Tucson, Arizona.

Jim and Carol sold their house in New Jersey last month and came to Tucson, Arizona. They explained why they relocated: "All the big companies are moving here. We are sure that there are many jobs available. If we don't find good jobs in three or four months, we'll go back to Newark, New Jersey. Maybe we'll go to the Pacific Northwest, to California or to Oregon."

The "Sunbelt" region has the highest population increase in the United States today. More and more people are relocating to the "Sunbelt."

1. Which of these states is in the "Sunbelt?"
 - a. California b. Nevada c. Oregon d. New Jersey
2. The weather in the "Sunbelt" is
 - a. changeable b. rainy c. cold d. dry
3. Companies move to the "Sunbelt" because
 - a. there are many unemployed people there.
 - b. there are no business taxes.
 - c. it's in the Northeast.
 - d. energy costs are lower.
4. Jim and Carol Razinski moved
 - a. to find jobs.
 - b. to buy a house.
 - c. because of their health.
 - d. because of their age.

5. In the passage, relocate means
 - a. repeat
 - b. move
 - c. construct
 - d. reverse
6. In the passage, population means
 - a. amount of land.
 - b. number of businesses.
 - c. number of people.
 - d. plants and animals.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

1. Look at your teacher's resume and find out if your teacher has changed jobs. How many jobs has your teacher had in the last five years? Has your teacher ever relocated?
2. Write a paragraph about relocation in the USSR. You may want to interview a friend or relative about their experience.
3. Talk to a neighbor in your apartment building. Find out if s/he is a recent arrival in New York. You may want to ask your superintendent. Find out how this person came to New York, when s/he came, and ask for several reasons why this person decided to come to New York. Find out if this person likes New York, and if s/he thinks s/he has made a good decision. Be prepared to report to the class.

2. HOUSING

Activity A "A Telephone Call: Dialog"

Introductory Observations: Subsidized housing, company housing, and uniform low rents contrast with the rental and purchase market in the United States. Tenants in the Soviet Union are accustomed to dealing with local housing bureaucracies in matters of rental, repairs, and possible cooperative purchases of apartments.

A concierge, or a maintenance crew, exist as analogs to the American superintendent or building manager, but landlords, as individual proprietors of rental properties, are rare. Rental charges and the maintenance/quality of housing stock are strictly regulated in the USSR. The only aspect not controlled by state directives is the rental of individual rooms, an activity in which any Soviet citizen may participate. There are no price ceilings or controls on such sub-leasing.

Many Soviet citizens find housing through their unions, clubs, or Party membership. Unions frequently finance the cooperative purchase of buildings or apartment complexes.

Since housing is considered to be a social institution, there have been many experiments in living environments.

Kitchens, dining areas, and household maintenance have, in many cases, been collectivized. Child care is often a feature of apartment complexes.

For these reasons, apartment or house-hunting in the United States should be presented to Soviets as a consumer's activity. Most building properties are not publicly owned or managed; rents and quality of housing stock vary widely.

Since the standard features of an American rental property, along with the legal prerogatives of landlord and tenant, are under local jurisdictions, the following tasks are oriented specifically to New York City tenancy.

Material and Instructions: Activity A

The telephone call is centered around this classified advertisement:

2 BR, eat-in kitch sunny
locked bldy, intcom, \$425
2 mo's securty, cal land-
lord (212) 268-4325 immed.

DIALOG

Alla: Hello. I'm calling about your ad.

Landlord: Which ad? The ad for the apartment, or the one for the house?

Alla: The apartment. Can you tell me how many rooms are in the apartment?

Landlord: No, the apartment is already rented. But are you interested in the house?

Alla: How much is the rent?

Landlord: It's not much more than the apartment's rent. The apartment was in a bad neighborhood. You'll like the house.

Alla: How many rooms does it have?

Landlord: I can't tell you over the phone. You have to come and see it. Come now, come right away.

Alla: I'm sorry. I can't come now, I'm at work. Can I come at 6 o'clock?

Landlord: No. Six o'clock is too late.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What questions did Alla ask about the apartment? About the house?
2. What questions did the landlord answer about the house?
3. What have you learned about the house?
4. Why couldn't Alla go to see the house?
5. Why do you think the landlord wanted Alla to come right away?
6. If you were Alla, would you have left work immediately?
7. If you were Alla, what questions would you have asked the landlord over the phone?

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

1. Look in the newspaper for an ad for a house to rent. How much is the monthly rent? If you cannot find an ad, decide how much the rent for a 2 bedroom house would be. Change the dialog, and give the landlord answers with more information.
2. Imagine that you are going to see the landlord's house. Write a list of questions to ask the landlord. Write a list of things you want to see in the house, for example, the heating, the bathroom, the refrigerator.

3. When you look for a place to live, do you go alone or with your family? Who makes this kind of decision in your family?
4. Describe your apartment to the class. What do you like about it? What do you dislike about it?

Activity B "Rent Computation: Reading and Problem-Solving"

Materials and Instructions: Activity B

Even a simplified explanation of the New York City "rent stabilization" code is difficult to read. The reading passages should be carefully discussed, with attention paid to content and vocabulary, before the students, in groups, attempt to finish the tasks.

READING PASSAGE: RENT STABILIZATION

New York City has a law called the "rent stabilization code." This law determines the maximum rent which a landlord can ask for an apartment. Only apartment buildings with more than six apartments are controlled by this law.

Problem #1: Igor found an apartment in a two family house. The landlord lives in the ground floor apartment. Igor will live in the other apartment. Will Igor's apartment be controlled by the "rent stabilization code?"

READING PASSAGE: MORE INFORMATION

The "rent stabilization" code says that when an apartment is empty, the landlord can ask a new tenant to pay rent that is 20% more than the last year's rent. Twenty percent is the maximum increase in the new rent.

Problem #2: The Saltykov family will move into a building that has 20 apartments. Last year, the apartment rent was \$350. What will the maximum rent be now?

READING PASSAGE: MORE INFORMATION

The "rent stabilization" code is complex, so many tenants have formed "tenants' councils." These tenants' groups give free advice on housing problems to people who live in the neighborhood.

Problem #3: The Chernovs believe that their rent is higher than the maximum. They live on West 61st Street. Which tenants' council is in their neighborhood?

Metropolitan Council on Housing
24 W. 30th Street, N.Y., N.Y.

Lenox Hill Neighborhood Association
331 E. 70th Street, N.Y., N.Y.

West Side Tenants' Union
155 W. 72nd Street, N.Y., N.Y.

Flatbush Tenants' Council
1604 Newkirk Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y.

3. CONSUMERISM

Introductory Observations: The wide availability of imported and American goods in retail outlets is impressive to those who have left an economy with an unevenly developed consumer sector. The American style of comparative shopping will be a new experience, therefore the services provided free of charge, such as home delivery, should be discussed.

Activity A "Comparative Prices: Reading Comprehension"

Materials and Instructions: Activity A

Actual flyers issued by competing supermarkets, or full-page ads from newspapers, can be distributed to class members, along with a question sheet. Categories of food packaging and preparation should be stressed, since few ersatz products (such as egg or cream substitutes) are produced in the USSR.

TWO SUPERMARKET FLYERS

M Mart

Potatoes, 10 lbs., \$1.89
Tomatoes, 16 oz. can, 79¢
Salted butter, 1 lb., \$1.98

K Mart

Potatoes, 5 lbs., \$1.09
Tomatoes, 12 oz. can, 49¢
Margerine, 1 lb., \$1.59

M Mart

Beets, bunch, 59¢
 Green peppers, 1 lb., 89¢
 Onions, 5 lbs., \$1.09
 Sour cream, 12 oz., \$1.05
 Tomatoes, garden fresh,
 1 lb., 89¢

K Mart

Onions, 5 lbs., 99¢
 Beets, bunch, 79¢
 Green peppers, 1 lb., 49¢
 "Sour King", 12 oz., 79¢
 Bakery rolls, doz., 99¢

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Where are the dairy products on sale?
2. How much is a pound of fresh tomatoes? A pound of canned tomatoes?
3. Which store has more lower priced vegetables?
4. What different categories of weights are listed? What quantities are listed?
5. What other products do you have to buy to make borscht? Which borscht ingredients are on sale?

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

1. Compare American food prices with the prices you remember in your home town. Make a list of five products which are cheaper in America, and five products which were cheaper in the Soviet Union.
2. Translate your favorite recipe into English, and use American measurements.
3. Describe three new food products you have discovered in America. Describe three products that you cannot find here.
4. If you know how to make kvass, vodka, wine, or yoghurt at home, make a list of the ingredients you must buy to make one of these products.

Activity B "A Complaint Letter: Controlled Writing"

Introductory Observations: Manners of expressing grievances are also culture-bound. Recent sociological studies often describe the Soviet emigres as vociferous. Criticism in various forms is institutionalized in many Soviet proceedings. Americans, too, are characterized by other Westerners as being assertive and aggressive. Therefore, merely the format or code, but not the practice of complaining, needs exposure in the all-Soviet ESL class.

Materials and Instructions: Activity B

The sample letter is based upon a rather typical incident in American advertising and consumer practice. The letter explains that a mail-order shipment has not been properly fulfilled. Since many of the emigres own televisions, they may have already been exposed to late-night TV offers. It would provide more context if the instructor taped a version of the offer, to give introductory exposure to the class. The sentences in the letter have been numbered to facilitate references to specific items.

A COMPLAINT LETTER

1425 Avenue U
Brooklyn, New York 11231
March 29, 1980

Complete Cookware Offer
 Box 1978
 Radio City Station
 New York, New York 10017

Dear Sir

(1) I ordered a Complete Cookware set three weeks ago. (2) When it arrived, I counted the number of pots in the set. (3) I found that there were only four pots.

(4) In your television ad, you say that the set contains seven pots. (5) In my set, the three large pots are missing.

(6) Please send me the three large pots as soon as possible. (7) Thank you for your attention and help.

Sincerely,

Gennady Prussac

Directions for completing this activity:

- (1) Read the letter. Underline any words you do not understand. Discuss the letter with the class. Tell about the problem in your own words.
- (2) You will rewrite this letter, but you have a problem with two Complete Tableware sets. You must make these changes in the letter:

- a. Write your own address on the top right side of your paper.
- b. Change the company's name to Complete Tableware Offer.
- c. Do not change the company's address.
- d. In sentence 1, change a Complete Cookware set to two Complete Tableware sets.
- e. In sentence 2, change it to the plural form; change pots to knives.
- f. In sentence 3, change pots to knives.
- g. In 4, change set to the plural; change the agreement of the verb; change seven pots to fourteen knives.
- h. In 5, change set to the plural; change the three large pots to ten knives.
- i. In 6, change the reference to pots.
- j. Do not change sentence 7.
- k. Sign your name under Sincerely.
- l. Print your name under your signature.
- m. On the back of your paper, draw a rectangle

that is ten inches long and six inches high. Print your name and address on the top left corner; your name is on the first line, and your address is under it. Print the company's name and address in the same way in the center of the rectangle.

Activity C "Unsolicited Mail: Dialog"

Introductory Observations: The widespread phenomenon of American advertising, and, in particular, the multiple forms it assumes, are unfamiliar to recent Soviet immigrants. The initial receipt of junk mail can be a disturbing and even frightening experience, since the individual does not know how and why s/he is being contacted.

Materials and Instructions: Activity C

The instructor may bring in samples of actual junk mail for students to read and discuss. The dialog is set in front of the building mailboxes, where Yefim and Gregorio meet.

DIALOG

- Y: Why are you throwing those letters in the garbage can? You haven't read them.
- G: They aren't important letters. They are junk mail.
- Y: What is junk mail?
- G: They are advertisements. They look like letters. Sometimes the company prints your name on the letter and writes "Dear Gregorio" too. But I know these aren't personal letters.
- Y: But how do the companies know your name?
- G: They can find your name in the telephone book.

- Y: I think that I got a junk letter too. Look, this letter's address is "Tenant Apartment 3-D".
- G: Yes, that is junk mail. The company has sent one to every tenant in our building.
- Y: I think I'll read the letter. It's good practice for my English.
- G: Yes. Sometimes it is a good idea to read junk mail, because sometimes you can find things on sale.

4. MONEY MANAGEMENT

Activity A "Paying a Bill: Dialog"

Introductory Observations: Most medium sized to large financial transactions in the United States are not conducted in cash. This contrasts with common practice in the USSR, where credit cards are not known, and checking account privileges are restricted to the use of business firms.

Materials and Instructions: Activity A

The dialog is set in a bank. It features a working woman and a bank teller, and incorporates a great deal of banking terminology.

DIALOG

Alla: I'd like to pay this bill, please.

Teller: You can't pay that bill here. You have to mail your payments to the company.

Alla: I'm sorry, I didn't know that. May I have \$55 from my savings account?

Teller: Yes. But, Miss, don't send cash through the mail. You can get a money order here. It's like a check.

Alla: All right. Give me a money order.

Teller: You need a withdrawal slip and a money order form. Go back to the desk and fill them out. You can come to the front of my line when you're ready. And, remember that the money order costs 25¢.

Alla: Thank you. Such bureaucracy! Such long lines!

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

1. Fill out deposit and withdrawal forms.
2. Write out checks and checking account deposit slips.
3. Given a collection of monthly utility bills, fill out all the withdrawal slips and money order forms necessary.

Activity B "Budget and Buying: Problem-Solving"

Introductory Observation: Credit purchases are accommodated in the Soviet Union by types of union-sponsored or collective installment plans.

Materials and Instructions: Activity B

The reading passage which sets out the problem is rather long. The students should be asked to restate all the options in their own words before they begin group work on the solutions. The passage can be redone in a role-play situation. The passage introduces vocabulary related to credit purchasing.

IGOR'S DILEMMA

Igor has \$65. He wants to buy a new sofa. He has decided that he can spend \$30 from his monthly salary to make new purchases. He knows that with \$30 every month he can only buy small things, but he thinks that he needs a sofa. He often has many guests in his home.

He has found an attractive sofa in a department store. It costs \$295, plus 8% sales tax.

The saleswoman told him that he can buy the sofa on the department store's installment plan. If he wants to do this, he must make the first \$50 payment immediately. The monthly payments will be \$50.

The saleswoman told Igor another way to pay for the sofa. She suggested that Igor start a charge account. Then, he could buy the sofa and many other items in the store. If Igor starts a charge account, he does not have to make a first cash payment. He will receive bills at his home. He will have to pay a minimum of \$25 to the store every month, and every month an 18% interest fee will be added to the balance of his charge account bill.

Igor went home and spoke with his cousin. She told him to wait until December, when the store will have its yearly sale on sofas. Then, he can get a cheaper sofa.

Igor's uncle said that he would lend him \$200. Igor's uncle does not want to charge interest on the loan, since Igor is his nephew.

Instructions to students: What should Igor do? Divide into groups and select a group secretary. The secretary will write down the group's answers. Discuss these choices. If you can think of other things Igor should do, be prepared to explain them to the class. Write your answers in this way: "If I were Igor, I would ..."

SOME OPTIONS

- a. the installment plan
- b. the charge account
- c. wait for a sale
- d. borrow from a relative

5. COMMUNITY ORIENTATION

Activity A "The Neighborhood: Giving Directions"

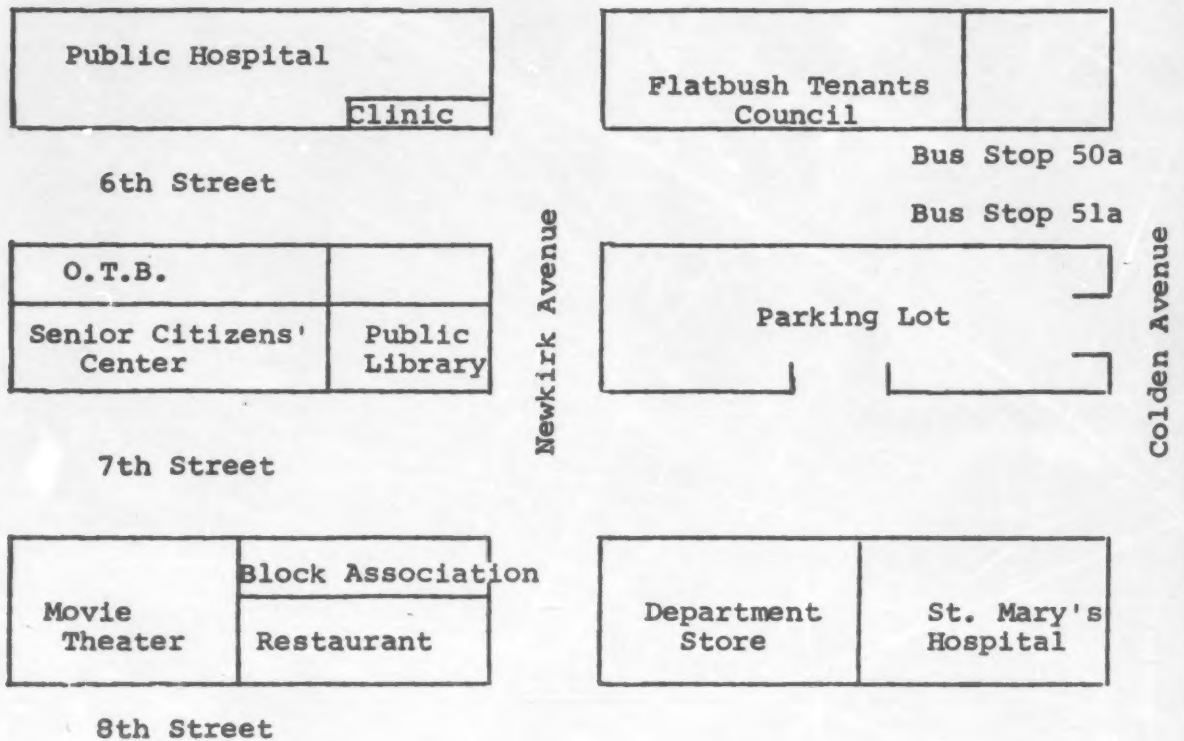
Introductory Observations: The American distinction between "public" and "private" institutions can be confusing to Soviet immigrants, especially since some "private" institutions operate with state or federal funds, or are directly concerned with the public's welfare. In addition, some American "public" institutions charge for their services, while some "private" advocacy services are cost-free.

There is a great deal of "grass roots" or community-based public service activity in the New York area, so emphasis may be placed on the number of helping agencies available. The problem, however, is in finding the locations of these agencies. The New Yorker's strong identification with the neighborhood, or ethnic community, makes the neighborhood center a good place to look.

Materials and Instructions: Activity A

The neighborhood map is used as a vehicle to give students oral practice in asking for and giving directions; it also serves an orientation purpose in terms of its particular content. The idea for the activity is taken from the ESL text, Challenge: A First Reader/Workbook

in English³⁶ by Saitz and Stieglitz.



Instructions to the students: You are standing in front of the movie theater. You must go to the Public Library. Ask for directions. Here's an example:

Question: Excuse me, how do I get to the Public Library?

Answer: You walk to Newkirk Avenue, then turn left. At the next intersection, turn left. It's across the street.

Other places: Now ask for directions to these places. You

are in front of the movie theater.

- a. The public hospital clinic
- b. The Senior Citizens' Center
- c. Bus stop 51a.

³⁶Robert L. Saitz and Francine B. Stieglitz, Challenge: A First Reader/Workbook in English (Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers, 1978).

Activity B "Map Reading: Fill in the Blanks"

1. The Senior Citizens' Center is _____ the library.
2. _____ is next to the department store.
3. The Tenants' Council is across the street from _____.
4. The clinic entrance is on the corner of _____ and _____.
5. The 7th Street Block Association is on _____.

Activity C "Map Reading: Making Inferences and Matching"

Instructions to the students: Six organizations or institutions are listed in column A. In column B, I have written the purpose of each place. Match the purpose with the institution. Write the letter from column B in the blank next to the name in column A. The first question has been filled in with its match; it is an example.

<u>A</u>		<u>B</u>
1. I go to the Block Association	<u>C</u>	a) to see a doctor.
2. I go to the public clinic	_____	b) to meet older people
3. I go to the Senior Citizens' Center	_____	c) to get news about the neighborhood.
4. I go to the Tenants' Council	_____	d) to borrow books.
5. I go to the Public Library	_____	e) to talk about a housing problem.

Activity D "Contrasting Services: Reading, Discussion
and Writing"

Introductory Observations: The Soviet "polyclinic" (comprehensive community medical clinic) is, in many ways, analogous to an American public hospital's clinic. Both are beset by similar problems of overcrowding, reduced staff, and a high patient load. One major difference between them, however, is that the Soviet public medical care is cost-free, as are laboratory tests and prescriptions.

Materials and Instructions: Activity D

The reading passage is an attempt at a realistic, simplified account of a patient's impressions of a public hospital clinic. Students can read and discuss the passage, and compare it with their own experiences.

THE CLINIC

Last week, I felt sick, so I went to a public hospital clinic. There were many people sitting in the waiting room. I didn't know what to do or where to go, so I stood in the doorway. A guard told me to speak to the nurse at the desk.

First, the nurse wrote my name on a long list. She asked me how I felt. She then told me to sit down and wait.

I waited for almost an hour. Another nurse called my name. It was difficult to understand her, because she didn't pronounce my name correctly. I don't think that she spoke English very well.

The nurse took me to an examination room. I sat on the bed, and the nurse began to fill out many forms. She asked me for my name and address, the name of my insurance company, and the names of my parents and children. She also asked me about my health.

The doctor came after the nurse was finished with her work. He examined me, and he told me to go to the X-ray room.

I walked to the X-ray room and saw many people waiting there. Some of them looked very sick, but some of them looked very healthy, and I was angry that I had to wait behind them. I was pleased when I saw the X-ray machine; it looked modern.

I waited to see my doctor again. I noticed other doctors in the corridors. They were all men.

The doctor gave me a note for the pharmacy, a prescription. I walked to the clinic pharmacy, and I had to pay \$20 for a small bottle of pills. The pharmacist told me to go to the cashier. The cashier asked me for \$75. This was the fee for the clinic examination and for the X-ray.

I was very surprised. It was all so expensive.

Instructions to the students: Divide into groups.
Make a list of the differences you see between an
American clinic and a polyclinic. You can underline
sentences in the story that show differences. Then,
write a story about your visit to a polyclinic.

Part V: A Brief Contrastive Analysis of Russian and English

There are many instances of transfer and interference in the performance of Russian-dominant speakers who are learning English. The following three sections will introduce the ESL instructor to some of the basic, and most common, errors which can occur in the classroom.

1. A Contrast in Graphic Systems

The alphabet of the Russian language is called the Cyrillic alphabet. There are now 33 letters in the Cyrillic alphabet; it had been modernized in the earlier part of this century, when Lenin inaugurated the first literacy campaign. At that time, some redundant, or unpronounced, letters were eliminated. There is a significant sound/symbol correspondence in Russian.

As in the English graphic system, Russian print or typeface is different from Russian script. Unfortunately for ESL students, both Cyrillic print and script present some false analogies with the English graphic system. Letters representing different phonemes in English and in Russian look quite similar. In some instances, only an upper- or lower-case version will be problematic. List A shows which English phoneme a Russian-dominant speaker will produce if s/he mistakes the English printed or typed

letter for its similar-looking Russian counterpart.

LIST A: CYRILLIC PRINT

	<u>Cyrillic</u>	<u>Letter</u>	<u>Associated</u>	<u>Phoneme</u>
upper and lower case	B	b		/v/
	Y	y		/u/
	C	c		/s/
	U	u		/e/
upper case only	H			/n/
	P			/r/
lower case only		g		/d/

List B shows false analogies in the script systems. It is interesting to note that long after a Russian-dominant student has mastered English script, a particular tic will often remain--that is the overlining of the English letter "m". This is due to the fact that, in Russian, the analogous letter is overlined to differentiate it from an identical script letter which conventionally is underlined, the "sh". In addition, the ESL teacher may notice that adult Soviet emigre students appear to resent being asked to write in print or block letters. In the USSR, only very young schoolchildren print.

LIST B: CYRILLIC SCRIPT

	<u>Cyrillic Letter</u>	<u>English Letter</u>
upper and lower case	D d	D d
upper case only	Т	g
lower case only	m n p	t p r

2. Brief Notes on Morphology

The dual function of many English words as both noun and verb has been cited by Caleb Gattegno as an illustration of the "remarkable economy" of our language. It is a point of frustration for many ESL students, including Russian-dominant ones. Russian morphological categories are more clearly distinguishable by appropriate suffixes. Examples of dual function words in English include: work, pay, order, purchase, look, test, experiment.

There are three grammatical genders in the Russian language: masculine, feminine, and neuter. Gender is indicated by suffixes. As in other languages with grammatical gender, some animate or human referents possess a gender designation which is contrary to fact. For example, the word "child" is neuter, as is its pronoun referent.

Due to historical factors, there are many borrowed French words in the Russian language today. There are relatively few borrowed English words--blue jeans, nightclub and jazz are among them. A few false cognates do exist, such as "decade" which, in Russian, indicates a ten-day period and "governor", which may be mistaken for a similar-sounding word meaning 'governess' in Russian.

3. Brief Notes on Syntax

One of our most common verbs or X-words, "to be", has an equivalent in Russian only in the simple past and future tenses. It is zero in the present tense.

While demonstrative articles exist in Russian, definite and indefinite articles do not. Thus, the four word English statement, "He is a student," when translated into Russian, is composed of only two words, pronoun and noun.

Since Russian is a highly inflected language, word order in statements and questions is not as rigid as it is in English. The "floating prepositional phrase" is a common error in Russian-dominant students' writing and speech, because, in their native language, a prepositional phrase can occupy almost any slot.

For these reasons, X-word grammar activities are strongly recommended for Soviet emigre students.

Part VI: Concluding Remarks

Sociological studies of the Soviet immigration experience have repeatedly pointed to the existence of interpersonal problems between Americans and Soviets. These have arisen in the continuing contacts between American social service professionals and Soviet emigres. Lenore Parker cites an illustrative, composite reaction: "'Arrogant, impossible, unwilling to take directions, unwilling to believe anything you tell them' are just a few of the comments made by professionals and lay people alike in talking about the Soviet refugees, followed usually by the plaintive statement: 'So much is being done for them. What do they want?'"³⁷

It is certainly more constructive, and more enlightening, to shift our focus from the personal to the social realm. As we have seen, many of the difficulties arising between Soviets and Americans are products of cultural misperceptions on both sides. The sources of friction are rooted there, rather than in exclusively personal eccentricities.

As Americans, most of us have known (at first- or second-hand) a qualitatively different kind of immigration

³⁷Lenore Parker, "From Paternalism to Pluralism," 38.

experience. Our attitudes towards today's immigrants are tempered by these recollections. Correspondingly, our expectations may be too high, and our evaluations, too harsh. Here is the situation viewed from a Soviet immigrant's perspective: "The New York Association people (resettlement counselors) are old people who came from Russia a long time ago. They are salaried people and very frustrated, probably poorly paid, and have no common language with the young. They take their frustrations out on us. The old people in the agency say, 'When we came, no one helped us.' They don't differentiate among Russian immigrants. We are all viewed as second rate, Proletariats. They probably view us as parasites...The professionals treat us like garbage; they are very patronizing."³⁸

As teachers, our work with students in the ESL classroom can be a mutually instructive experience. Just as students learn by doing, rather than by assimilating pre-digested concepts, teachers learn by listening, understanding, and being taught by their students.

Learning and teaching are processes of change and exchange. In many instances, newly arrived Soviet immigrants view American social practices through a kind of reversing prism, since their lives in the Soviet

³⁸George E. Johnson, "Which Promised Land?", 4-5.

Union contrasted so sharply with ours here. In working with Soviet immigrants, we may well acquire a deeper insight into our society, our teaching methods, and our heretofore unquestioned cultural assumptions.

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